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A Song of Service



John R. Hand









A SONG OF SERVICE

BY

JOHN R. HAND
(JUST PLAIN JOHN)



DEDICATED TO THE WORKINGMEN OF AMERICA, ESPE-
CIALLY MY FATHER, WHO TAUGHT ME
BY PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE,
THE DIGNITY OF
LABOR,



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**"Saxa et solitudines respondent voci; immanes bestæ sapæ
Flectuntur atque consistent cantu; nos instituti
Optimus rebus, non moveamur voce
Poetarum?"**

—Cicero, pro Archia, poeta.



A SONG OF SERVICE.

(An Allegory.)

I.

The lowering clouds piled bank on bank,
And poised against the ebon sky;
The fitful gusts of blinding rain;
The thunder's roll; the lightning's crash;
The lashing tree tops in the wind,
Proclaim the coming hurricane.

And as I turned me from the furrowed field
Where all day long in eager ceaseless toil,
I'd labored earnestly, my soul cried out
Unto the elements. Faith, Love, and Hope,
Were gone. My life rebellious seemed to bend
Unto the spirit of the coming storm.
"Oh God," I cried, "If Thou indeed can hear
The prayers that mortal utters unto Thee,
Why hast Thou left me thus alone, to work
And struggle on a tiller of the soil?
Have I not loved Thee, served Thee earnestly?
Has not my heart in love gone out to Thee?
Does not my voice proclaim Thy lasting praise?
Then why hast Thou withheld from me, alone
A message to the world that Thou art God?
I would that I might stand with pleading voice
Before the multitude. Or that my life

Be spent in foreign climes to teach Thy Word.
Oh God, not selfishly I pray, but ask
That my life might be spent for Thee alone."

Thus prayed I unto God rebelliously.
And as I prayed my misty eyes grew dim,
I threw myself upon my lowly couch
And ere my tired form could rest at ease
I slept.

II.

I felt a touch upon my brow.
A maiden fair and beautiful to see,
With outstretched arms she beckoned me to
come.
"What wouldst thou, Maiden?" spake I unto her.
She answered not a word but took my hand
And, helping me arise, she led me forth,
And unresistingly I followed on.
We seemed to rise into the starry night,
The dark world sank and melted from our view,
Yet felt I no distrust but followed on.
And then we came within a realm of light.
The stars were gone and all the universe
Was bathed in radiant glow, so dazzling bright
My eyes were blind. I turned me to my guide,
And as I turned she spoke—
"Oh, foolish mortal, in thy feeble strength
Thou daredst rebel against Almighty God.
Thou daredst to plead against thy human lot,
As if the God that madest thee knowest not

How thou must live to love and serve Him best.
Thy foolish prayer came to the throne of God,
And He, Great Heart, that bled on Calvary,
For thee did intercede, and I am sent
To guide thee thus into the light of Truth.
"Know thou, oh man, that in the plan Divine
There is no 'great' nor 'small.' 'Tis only man
Who magnifies the value of his sphere.
To God, the smallest form has equal worth
With mighty monarchs sitting on their thrones.
For who neglects the smallest deed or thought
Makes mighty ones impossible to do;
As he who fails to lay foundations firm
Despoils the builder of a fortress strong.
"But that the lesson thou mightst learn indeed,
And unto all the world the message give,
Immortal's sight I briefly grant to thee.
Thou who didst doubt the wisdom of thy God,
Thou who didst grieve the hardness of thy lot,
Oh puny man, rebellious one, Behold!"

And as she spoke the radiant light was changed,
My eyes began to pierce the brilliant glow.
Behold, I stood within a country fair
And wonderful to view. Broad streams were
flanked
By stately palms and fields of waving grain.
The lowly cot of worker here and there
Was decked with flowers and pennants waved
aloft.
It seemed a gala holiday.

Along

The broad highway there pressed a mighty
throng,

Who shouted, sang, and laughed, with one accord.

Again I turned unto my guide. She spoke—

“This kingdom is called Righteousness. Within
Its realm no blighting sorrow ever comes.

Here Happiness, and Joy, and sweet Content
Are ever found. Here Justice reigns supreme.

But now the Monarch's edict has gone forth
To all the subjects of his kingdom grand,
This day the greatest day of all shall be.

For Justice groweth old, and ere the scythe
Of Death, grim reaper, cut him down would
choose,

From out the subjects of his mighty land,
Three men as helpmetes to his daughters three,
And whosoe'er shall please the eye of Love,
The eldest of the three, shall be made king
And reign supreme when Justice pass away.

“But come, the day is growing old, and would
We see the gathering at the Capital
We must away.” She clasped me by the hand,
And ere the balmy breeze could sway a leaf,
Ere flashing ray could kiss the flowerlet sweet,
With speed of thought we moved upon the air,
And stood within a courtyard rich and grand.
Oh wondrous scene! How can the tongue of
man

With mortal speech such view entrancing tell?

Broad marble walks, betrimmed with gold, were
edged

With velvet sod and flowerlets bright and fair.
And here and there a sparkling fountain played
'Neath stately trees, with leaves of every hue
That caught the brilliant sunshine's dazzling ray
And flashed it to the gold fish as they played
Within the fountain's cool and balmy depths.
The graceful antelope, with mincing steps
Selects a way unto the fountain's brink,
While warbling songsters 'mid the leafy trees
Rend all the air with heavenly melody.

And where unites these leafy avenues
There forms an open space where stands the
thrones

Of sovereign Justice, and his daughters three,
Fair Prudence, wisdom, and the radiant Love.
In ebon blackness rose the monarch's throne,
Nor robe, nor drapery graced the monarch's
chair,

Lest in the midst of ease and luxury
Shouldst mighty Justice be debauched in shame.
At either side there stood a smaller throne,
Bedecked in raven robes, where Prudence sat
With Wisdom, ever at their father's side.
And at his feet in startling contrast stood,
A pure white chair where sat the radiant Love.
And as I gazed the sound of music sweet
Was waften on the balmy breeze to me.
I heard the marching of a multitude;

The trampling steed; the rumbling sound of
wheels;

The shouts of men, the songs of women fair;
And blending all the voice of children sweet
Sang praise to God and glory to their king.
And then, emerged from out the verdant way,
This glorious throng approached the monarch's
throne.

First came the radiant Love, so fair to see,
That could I e'en despoil the tongues of men,
Should all in Nature give its grace and strength,
And fairest flowers their beauty should bestow,
Should azure skies and starry depths of night
And all the universe lend valiant aid,
Yet would the face and form of Love surpass.
Next came the hoary monarch, old and blind.
Upon the left fair Prudence tripped along
With stately Wisdom on the right to guide,
And followed on the mighty multitude.
Then Justice to his raven throne approached
And mounting high with firm and steady step
He turned his sightless eyes and faced the throng.
And then the populace grew strangely dumb
As Justice spoke with voice untamed by years.
"Good friends," he said, "I've called you here
today

To bid farewell to all I know or love,
For ere yon blazing sun shall span the sky
Shall Justice be no more. A thousand years
In peace and quietude has Justice reigned
And yesternight as on my couch I lay

A vision came to me. My blinded eyes,
That ne'er since first the breath of life I drew
Discerned the light—beheld an angel fair.
She spoke to me and said, 'It is enough.
Thy mission here is almost made complete.
From out the populace shall come a man
To reign when thou art gone. But fear thou not
For God shall guide thy choice and unto him
Whom God will send to rule shalt thou bestow
Thy daughter Love to wife.' Throughout the
land

My valiant sons have gone. Discretion bold,
And Judgment have gone out to find the man
Who might with Love rule o'er this mighty land.
Today they shall make known whom they have
found

And should by God's good grace the man appear,
Then justice shall depart and die in peace."

He ceased and from the multitude there came
A handsome youth and strong, with flaxen hair
And bright blue eyes and cheeks of rosy hue.
He humbly knelt before the monarch's throne
And thus addressed the ruler of the land—
"Oh mighty monarch of a mighty land,
Discretion speaks to thee. Throughout thy land
In patient search I traveled far and near.
In hamlet, town, and city fair, I looked
For one whom God might please to reign with
Love.

At length within a mansion bright and fair

I found a man whom all the people loved.
A handsome man is he and one of might,
And when he speaks all people stop to hear.
His name is Wealth, the eldest son of Thrift,
Thy faithful subject and thy faithful friend.
But ere he comes before thy mighty throne
I ask to know whom Judgment may have found."
"Tis well, Oh son of mine. Thy words do please
Mine ear. I would that Wealth might thus await
And Judgment shall make known whom he hath
found."

Again there came from out the multitude
A handsome youth. His hair was rave black;
His flashing eye pierced like a glowing coal.
With stately tread he now approached the throne
And kneeling there, in pleasing voice he spoke.
"Oh wondrous king! O mighty sire! I come!
'Tis Judgment speaks to thee. I traveled far,
Through every vail, o'er every hill I've gone;
In every cave and nook I searched in vain
For one so wise, so good and kind and true
That he might in thy stead rule over us.
And losing hope, at length I sat to rest
Beneath a cool and shady forest tree,
And resting there I found what I had sought,
A man, not comely to the eye 'tis true,
But gentle, wise and true to all mankind.
He came to me as on the ground I lay,
Like cooling draught the accents of his tongue.
There is no place within the universe
But what his brilliant mind has searched it out

And made it known. Yet modest too, this man,
And seeking only truth, not worldly fame,
For when I first did bid him come to thee
He thrice refused and said he had no thought
For worldly crown. 'Tis such a man I found.
His name is Knowledge, son of Diligence."
" 'Tis well, Oh son, thy message cheers my heart.
But ere I make a choice, methinks I hear
Within this mighty multitude a sound
Like distant shouts. Can there be discord now?
Has Justice lived too long and must he pass
With shout of traitor in his dying ear?"
And then I saw a mighty man step forth,
So large, so massive, and so strong was he,
That all the race were pigmies at his side.
Around his neck, his arms, his limbs, was wound
A heavy chain of iron in length on length,
Yet stepped he forth with ne'er a sign of shame.
Like monarchs march to righteous war he trod.
And as I gazed upon this mighty man
My heart stood still like bird by serpent charmed,
For as with magic power I seemed to view
As in a glass my giant counterpart.
On either side there marched a stalwart guard.
The one with sober mien and stern, he seemed
The elder of the two. But one was kind.
His gentle face was worn with care and grief,
Yet ever on his lips there lurked a smile.
Before the monarch's throne they knelt alone,
For whom they brought in chains would not
kneel down,

But stood with head erect before the king.
Then he of sterner mien addressed the throne:
"Oh noble king, thy servant's name is Law.
O'er all thy land my secret watch is kept,
And all thy people answer to my voice.
Thy slightest word by me is made supreme,
And born through all the land for men to hear.
But yesterday thy mandate did go forth
That on this day of days all men should rest.
Yet as I traveled on my journey here,
Behold, this man did mow the golden grain.
I reasoned long but answer gave he none,
But labored on until the field was bare.
So bound with chains I've brought him here to
thee,
To punish as thy pleasure thinks it mete.
Behold this man did disobey thy word,
Yet he kneels not in penitence to thee."
The gentler one then spoke, "Oh righteous king,
My name is Gospel and throughout thy realm,
I'm known in peasant cot and palace grand.
Without my ceaseless watch thou couldst not
rule,
And even Law would be despised by all.
I come to man when sick and sore distressed,
I whisper words of cheer and strength and love;
To him who weak and sinful disobeys,
I come with strength to fight and overcome,
For in my arm there is the strength of God.
Thus came I unto him whom we have brought,
But ne'er a word of sorrow did he speak;

With mighty stroke he swung the hissing scythe
And labored on until the work was done.
Then unresistingly with us he came,
And spake no word impatient or of scorn.
Then as we journeyed on our way we came
Unto a chasm deep. Our slippery path
Lay on the very brink, and as we walked,
The treacherous earth gave way beneath our feet,
But ere we fell, both Law and I to death,
This mighty man with strength unseen before,
Restored us both and bore us o'er the deep.
I therefore ask that thou, Oh king, will give
Unto this man a pardon full and free."

Then Prudence on whose face there glowed a
tear,

With pleading voice addressed the man in chains.
"Wouldst not thou bend the penitential knee?"

Then spake the man, his accent bold and deep:

"Not as a penitential come I here,

And kneel I unto none save God, alone.

Nor can the force of Law subdue my power,

Nor did the voice of Gospel bid me come.

Know thou, Oh king, that in this land of thine

There is no power can bind me save I will.

This massive chain, with which Law bound me
down,

Would fall like brittle threads from off my arms,
Should I exert but feeble strength. Behold!"

And as he spake he flexed his mighty arms;

With clanging crash the heavy chains dropped
down

Like spider's web before the sweeper's brush.
And then the monarch spoke, his voice was low.
"Then why hast thou before my throne ap-
peared?"

"I come, Oh king, because it's right to come;
Because to thee I owe my present strength.
My name is Labor, son of Toil am I.
When but a lad I was the slave of Greed,
Bound down with heavy chains I worked for him
And when my feeble strength was almost spent,
With cruel lash he urged me on the way.
And then one day the monarch rode in state,
Though seeing not he heard my piteous cry—
When Justice came, then Justice made me free.
And since that day I've grown in strength and
might,

Until through all the land there is no power
Can curb my will. Yet I have loyal been,
And e'er respect the mandates of thy court.
And came I not today to plead a cause
For Law and Gospel both have truly said
That on this day of days I did not rest,
But cut the grain although I knew thy will.
I therefore urge that thou wouldst speak my
doom,

And to the dictates of thy will I bow."
"Oh mighty man, I love thee. Even now,
I wouldst that I might act as once before,
And from a second bondage set thee free.
But through this land the monarch's word has
gone,

And from that word there can be no reprieve,
That he must die who wouldst my will despise.
That word is passed and therefore thou must die.”
And then the radiant Love with startled cry
Sprang prostrate down before the monarch’s
throne.

“Not so, Oh king; not so!” she cried in grief;
“’Tis Love thy daughter, speaks to thee, Oh king,
And ere this mighty man thou doomst to death,
I pray thee list unto this word of mine.
For many years has Labor been my friend.
When I wouldst fain have cheered some hungry
soul,

Or lifted up some tired and weary head,
My task had failed had Labor not been there.
And ne’er request so great or way so rough,
But Labor gladly moved at Love’s command.
And yesterday when at the monarch’s word
The message came that men shouldst rest today,
And come to thee to bid a last farewell,
Behold, I saw the grain was bending low,
The harvest time had come. The grain must fall
Or else when winter came the people die
For want of bread. The harvest must be made
Today. The morrow were too late to mow.
And when I saw the harvest would be lost,
I went to Labor where he lived alone,
And begged him there upon my bended knee,
That he would make the harvest ere he come.
And this he did for Love and not for self,
Yet he wouldst suffer in my stead, Oh king,

And therefore it is I who ought to pay."
And then in anguish cried the aged king—
"Oh God! My God! What hast thy servant done!
What cruel deeds are done in Justice's name!
With zeal for right I've killed my loving child."
And then there seemed a radiant light to shine
About his head, and groping blindly there,
He clasped his arms about the maiden's form.
"No, No! I see it all!" he cried aloud;
The word of God has been made clear to me.
I have been blind of heart as well as sight,
An drunk with power has Justice been debauched.
Now hear ye all the word that God has sent.
My son Discretion went him forth to find
A man who might with power rule over thee,
And he choose Wealth because he ruled with
 might
A city grand and people loved him so.
And he chose well, for Wealth a loyal friend,
And true has been. But should Wealth reign
 supreme,
His very strength might prove his overthrow.
For Wealth a servant, is a loyal friend;
But as a master oft destroys the man.
But some reward on him I wouldst bestow,
For faithful servant unto me he's been,
I therefore unto him do give to wife
My daughter Prudence as a loving guide.
For Wealth by Prudence led can ne'er astray.
Then Judgment came with Knowledge by his
 side,

And chose he him because so wise and kind.
Yet kindness oft is weakness when the man
Hath not the strength to stand for what is right,
And knowing much will not subdue the wrong.
Yet Knowledge has been kind and true to me,
And unto him I now bestow to wife
My daughter, Wisdom, to direct his way.
For Knowledge led by Wisdom must be right,
And blessings to my people they should bring.
"And then came forth the man whom God had
sent.

A Man so strong that he could disobey
An unjust word though came it from the king.
So strong was he that when the stalwart guards
That brought him here, did almost fall to death,
(And knowing well that at their death, he stood
Free from the condemnation of the king),
Yet grasped their hands and saved them ere they
fell.

And then so kind was he that he wouldst shield
The gentle Love who urged him to the deed.
That man is doomed to die. The word is passed
And word of monarch cannot e'er be changed.
Oh mighty man, whom God hath sent, Behold!
I say to thee that Labor is no more.
Henceforth thou art called Service. Thou shalt
reign

With radiant Love o'er all this mighty land.
For as in former years I made thee free,
So now with Love doth Justice make thee king."

III.

And then my eyes with dazzling light grew dim.
The court, the king, the multitude were gone,
And with wondrous guide I stood alone.

She spoke:

“Hast learned thy lesson well, Oh man?
If so return to earth from whence thou came,
And trouble not that fortune cast thy lot,
A working man, to fame and wealth unknown.
For if with Love thou workest in thy life,
Thou art a ruler of the universe.
For there's no power can cope with Labor's
strength,
And there's no strength that can Love's plea re-
sist,
And hast them both then thou art doubly blest
And thou shalt bless in service all mankind.
The master of the world is he who serves,
And service is but labor done in love.”

I woke as from a stupor deep as death,
And all the world seemed bright and fair to me.
The storm had passed. The sun shone brightly
down.

The air was filled with music of the birds,
And all in nature seemed o'erflowed with joy.
I rose and ere I fared forth to the field
I knelt in fervent prayer of thanks to God,
That I was made a tiller of the soil
To work with love in service to mankind.



JOHN R. HAND

(A Preacher with a roving commission.)
Mark 16:15.

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